

Challenging the Norm: A Phenomenological Exploration of Lecturers Deviance at Teacher Education Universities

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Abstract

Deviant behaviour among lecturers in teacher education universities poses a significant threat to the integrity and effectiveness of these institutions, which are responsible for shaping the ethical and professional development of future educators. This study employed a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of Heads of Departments (HoDs) regarding lecturer deviance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 HoDs at a teacher education university in Iran, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed a complex interplay of factors promoting and inhibiting deviant behaviours across administrative, educational, and pedagogical domains. This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying specific themes of developmental and inhibitive behaviours, offering a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of lecturer deviance, and proposing strategies for fostering a more ethical and effective academic environment within TEUs.

Keywords: Deviant Behaviour, Lecturer Deviance, Teacher Education University, Higher Education

1. Introduction

In complex workplace environments like educational institutions, where individuals from diverse backgrounds collaborate to achieve shared goals, the richness of perspectives can sometimes create conditions for deviant workplace behaviour (DWB). This behaviour emerges from multiple factors, including inefficient work processes, unclear expectations, and a lack of autonomy, all of which contribute to frustration and a sense of unfairness [1]. Organisational norms that tolerate or fail to enforce ethical guidelines can normalize DWB, while job dissatisfaction, stemming from feeling undervalued or underpaid, may drive individuals to engage in DWB as a form of expressing discontent [2]. Perceived organisational injustice, such as biased decision-making or unfair treatment, further exacerbates this behaviour, as employees seek

redress for their grievances [3]. Additionally, financial pressures, such as budget cuts or performance-based incentives, can foster a competitive environment that promotes DWB, and a stressful or toxic work environment only amplifies this behaviour [4]. Among these factors, job dissatisfaction and perceived injustice are particularly significant in contributing to DWB, which poses a serious threat to the performance and integrity of educational institutions, where trust, respect, and ethical conduct are crucial for fulfilling the institution's mission [5]. Such behaviour, which deviates from professional norms and ethical conduct, poses a threat to organisational performance and integrity, especially within higher education institutions [6], [7], [8].

Deviance defined sociologically as actions or conditions disvalued or condemned by society [9, 10], can manifest in informal behaviours that violate unwritten social norms or formal violations of laws and regulations. Despite its negative connotations, deviant behaviour can also be constructive, responding to environmental, situational, or individual factors in ways that challenge existing norms and promote innovation. This dual nature of DWB necessitates a nuanced understanding of its impact on employee performance and organisational dynamics, particularly in the increasingly complex environments shaped by globalisation, technological advances, and diverse personalities [13], [14]. However, traditional literature often frames DWB as inherently destructive, using terms such as "counterproductive work behaviour" or "organisational misbehaviour" to emphasize its negative impact [15], [16]. But recent studies by scholars like Zappala et al. [17] and Narayana and Murphy [18] suggest that DWB can be both inhibitory and growth-oriented, depending on how it is managed. This complexity is particularly relevant in educational institutions, including Teacher Education Universities (TEUs), where DWB can undermine both professional standards and the institution's effectiveness [19], [20], [21].

Higher education institutions are often envisioned as bastions of intellectual pursuit, critical thinking, and ethical conduct. Yet, these seemingly serene environments can be susceptible to the same human

failings that plague any workplace [6]. Deviant workplace behaviour (DWB), characterized by actions that violate organisational norms and threaten the well-being of individuals or the institution, is not exempt from the higher education context [17]. This issue becomes particularly significant in the context of Teacher Education Universities (TEUs), where the stakes are uniquely high. These institutions are entrusted with the critical mission of training and preparing future educators—individuals who will not only shape the minds of young people but also serve as role models, fostering ethical values in classrooms and communities. When DWB occurs within TEUs, it strikes at the heart of this mission, creating a corrosive environment that undermines both the institution and the future teachers it aims to prepare.

If DWB is prevalent within TEUs, it sends a contradictory message to aspiring teachers. On the one hand, these institutions advocate ethical behaviour and positive classroom practices. On the other hand, the presence of DWB signals that such values are not upheld within the institution itself, potentially eroding students' commitment to ethical behaviour [22], [23]. Over time, this disconnect can weaken public trust in the teaching profession and tarnish the image of the education system as a whole.

Moreover, TEUs should provide a safe and productive learning environment for both students and faculty. DWB, however, disrupts this atmosphere by creating climates of fear, intimidation, and mistrust. Such an environment stifles student engagement, hinders the learning process, and negatively impacts academic performance and student well-being [1], [5]. The presence of DWB within these institutions can severely diminish the quality of the educational experience, compromising the very foundation upon which effective teaching and learning are built [24].

Equally important is the role TEUs play in equipping future educators with the skills to navigate ethical dilemmas, manage conflicts constructively, and make sound decisions in their future classrooms. However, if DWB is tolerated within the institution, it weakens this foundation. Aspiring teachers may internalize these behaviours, resulting in the perpetuation of unethical practices in their own classrooms [25]. This not only compromises their effectiveness as educators but also negatively impacts the students they will teach and the communities they will serve. The ramifications of DWB within TEUs are far-reaching, extending beyond the institution itself. Educators exposed to or desensitized to DWB during their training may carry these behaviours into their own schools, perpetuating a cycle of harmful actions that ripple throughout the education system [26]. This can lead to a culture of disrespect within schools, weakening the very fabric of effective teaching and learning and hindering the success of educational initiatives at large [27].

To counteract these risks, TEUs must actively foster a culture of respect, responsibility, and ethical conduct. Addressing DWB decisively not only protects the immediate institutional environment but also sends a clear message that ethical behaviour is a core value [28]. By prioritizing ethical conduct, TEUs demonstrate their commitment to creating a supportive space where all members feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to the educational community [22], [23].

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Underpinnings

Understanding deviant workplace behaviour in higher education requires exploring several key theoretical frameworks that explain the individual and organisational factors driving such behaviours. Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals may engage in deviant workplace behaviour as a response to perceived inequities, such as inadequate rewards or unfair treatment, which lead to retaliatory behaviours [22], [25], [29]. General Strain Theory adds that workplace stress, job insecurity, and excessive demands may push individuals to deviate from professional norms as a coping mechanism [3], [30], [31].

Social Information Processing Theory emphasizes the role of institutional culture in shaping behaviour, suggesting that individuals may model deviant actions observed in their colleagues if such behaviour is normalized within the organisation [22], [23], [27]. Additionally, Social Identity Theory highlights how marginalized individuals may resort to deviance to assert their group's interests or resist perceived injustices [32], [33], [34]. Finally, White-Collar Crime Theory and Moral Disengagement Theory shed light on how academic institutions that prioritize performance over ethics may inadvertently foster deviant behaviours such as academic dishonesty [35], [36], [37], [38]. Among these, Social Exchange Theory and General Strain Theory are particularly relevant in explaining deviant workplace behaviour in higher education institutions, as they address the effects of perceived inequity and stress—both of which are prevalent in academic settings. By investigating these theories in the specific context of TEUs, this research aims to advance our understanding of how deviant behaviours arise and how they can be effectively managed for positive organisational outcomes.

Addressing deviant behaviours in Teacher Education Universities (TEUs), however, is crucial for several reasons, particularly due to the unique role these institutions play in shaping the ethical, professional, and academic standards of future educators. TEUs are responsible not only for academic instruction but also for fostering the professional behaviours and values that future

teachers will model in their classrooms. When deviant behaviours, whether constructive or inhibitive, emerge unchecked within these environments, they risk undermining the integrity of the teaching profession and the educational system at large.

This research addresses the critical gap in understanding deviant workplace behaviour (DWB) within Teacher Education Universities (TEUs) by examining the perceptions and experiences of department heads in navigating both constructive and inhibitive behaviours. The study highlights how leadership, organisational culture, and perceived support influence DWB, offering strategies to foster innovation while maintaining professional integrity. By exploring the dual nature of DWB, the research provides practical insights into managing such behaviours to promote organisational effectiveness and long-term institutional growth.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach based on Husserl's philosophy, to explore the lived experiences of HoDs regarding lecturer deviance. This approach is particularly suitable for understanding the complex and subjective nature of human experiences, allowing for a rich and nuanced exploration of the participants' perspectives.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 12 HoDs from various departments within a Teacher Education University in Iran. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants with diverse experiences and perspectives related to lecturer deviance. The participants had an average of 10 years of experience as HoDs and represented a range of academic disciplines.

3.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences while also ensuring consistency in the topics covered. An interview guide was developed based on the literature review and included questions related to:

- Participants' understanding of deviant behaviour in the academic context.
- Their experiences with lecturer deviance, including specific examples.
- The factors they perceive as contributing to or inhibiting deviant behaviour.

- The strategies they employ to address and manage deviant behaviour.
- The challenges and dilemmas they face in dealing with deviance.

Interviews were conducted in Farsi, the participants' native language, and lasted approximately 60 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke [52], was employed to analyze the interview data. The analysis process involved the following steps:

1. *Familiarization*: The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts multiple times.
2. *Generating Initial Codes*: Meaningful segments of text were identified and coded using descriptive labels.
3. *Searching for Themes*: Codes were grouped into potential themes based on shared patterns and meanings.
4. *Reviewing Themes*: The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data and captured the participants' perspectives.
5. *Defining and Naming Themes*: Clear definitions and names were developed for each theme, capturing the essence of the data.
6. *Producing the Report*: The findings were presented using the themes as an organizing framework, supported by illustrative quotes from the interviews.

To enhance rigor and trustworthiness, two researchers independently coded a subset of the transcripts, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Ethical considerations, such as participant confidentiality, informed consent, and transparency about interview recordings, were strictly followed throughout the research. Thematic networks were developed to represent the findings.

4. Result

The thematic analysis, as summarized in Table 1, provides a structured representation of the study's findings, categorizing deviant behaviours into a hierarchical framework of Super Global Themes, Global Themes, Organizing Themes, and Basic Themes, all supported by direct quotes from interviewees. The Super Global Theme encapsulates

the overarching dual nature of deviant behaviours - constructive and inhibitive - that influence the administrative, educational, and ethical dimensions of university life. Under this theme, Global Themes are further divided into two distinct categories: developmental and inhibitive behaviours.

Developmental behaviours, grouped under the Global Theme of "Constructive Deviance," include Organizing Themes such as challenging institutional norms, demonstrating responsibility, innovating in teaching, and making ethical contributions beyond formal duties. These behaviours are reflected in Basic Themes like proactive administrative decision-making, careful management of institutional resources, creative teaching methods, and ethical support for students. Quotes from interviewees provide vivid illustrations, such as one lecturer

stating, "I organized workshops to share knowledge beyond my official role," which highlights the positive contributions of developmental behaviours.

In contrast, the Global Theme of "Inhibitive Deviance" encompasses Organizing Themes related to neglect of responsibilities, unethical conduct, and behaviours that disrupt the professional environment. Basic Themes include expressing divisive political or religious views, neglecting classes, violating evaluation rules, and engaging in inappropriate relationships with students. Interviewees' quotes, such as, "Some colleagues avoid new teaching methods, sticking to outdated approaches," demonstrate how these inhibitive behaviours undermine institutional integrity and hinder educational progress.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Deviant Behaviours among University Lecturers

Super Global Theme	Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes	Direct Quotes
Deviant Behaviours of University Lecturers	Developmental Behaviours	Developmental Administrative Behaviours	Challenging the status quo	"I believe that the current system is rigid; we need more flexibility in decision-making processes."
			Responsibility in managing administrative property	"I always ensure that the equipment is well-maintained because it reflects our work ethics."
			Principled opposition to the organisation	"I refuse to implement policies that I believe are detrimental to the students' learning experience."
			Voluntary organisation of webinars and workshops	"I often organize workshops outside regular hours to share knowledge with students."
		Developmental Educational Behaviours	Creativity in virtual teaching	"I incorporate interactive tools like polls and quizzes in virtual classes to keep students engaged."
			Encouraging constructive competition	"I believe competition motivates students, so I encourage them to participate in academic challenges."
			Student-centered classroom	"My classroom revolves around students' needs, ensuring they actively participate in discussions."
			Creativity in evaluation	"I designed new evaluation methods to test students' analytical skills rather than rote memorization."
		Developmental Ethical Behaviours	Financial support for students	"A few times, I've helped students with fees because they were in genuine need."
			Volunteering in spiritual and cultural activities	"I regularly participate in cultural events, not just as a teacher, but as a mentor."
			Providing guidance to students beyond assigned duties	"Students often approach me with personal issues, and I make time to counsel them even outside my formal duties."
	Inhibitive Behaviours	Inhibitive Administrative Behaviours	Expressing political or religious views	"There are times when colleagues share opinions about politics, which makes the work environment uncomfortable."
			Lack of teamwork spirit	"He never participates in team meetings or group research projects, which isolates him from the team."
			Inability to accept criticism	"When we give him feedback on his teaching methods, he always gets defensive."
		Inhibitive Educational Behaviours	Neglecting educational duties	"Some of my colleagues don't take their classes seriously and often cancel or leave early."
			Violating evaluation rules	"I've seen instances where professors give grades based on their relationships with students rather than merit."
			Lack of innovation in teaching methods	"There's little to no attempt to update their teaching styles despite changing educational trends."
		Inhibitive Ethical Behaviours	Violent behaviour	"I've witnessed one professor shouting at students, which was very unsettling."
			Discrimination	"Certain professors show clear favoritism towards students of the same religious or ethnic background."
			Inappropriate friendships with students	"Some of the newer faculty members are too close to the students, which sometimes affects their judgment."

The data presented in Table 1, illustrates that while constructive behaviours drive organisational growth and innovation, inhibitive behaviours pose significant challenges that require strategic interventions from university leadership. This detailed thematic breakdown, supported by interviewee testimonies, offers crucial insights into managing deviant behaviours in educational institutions to promote a more cohesive, ethical, and effective academic environment.

5. Discussion

Educational institutions are foundational to the success of organisations, fostering skilled and motivated individuals. Teachers play a pivotal role in this mission, making educational leadership and the presence of competent, distinguished professors indispensable for achieving institutional goals. As highlighted by Cropanzano, Goldman, and Folger [22], organisational success relies on effectively harnessing the skills, abilities, and both individual and collective traits of employees in alignment with institutional objectives. In today's competitive landscape, Sypniewska, Baran, and Kłos [39] emphasize that a workforce comprised of committed and loyal employees is essential for enhancing efficiency and overall performance.

A critical aspect of maintaining institutional integrity is addressing deviant behaviours. Unchecked behaviours, such as neglecting duties, academic misconduct, or ethical violations, can erode trust and undermine the effectiveness of educational systems. Such deviant actions create an environment characterized by fear, mistrust, and disengagement, adversely affecting both staff and students. Furthermore, these behaviours convey conflicting messages to aspiring lecturers, jeopardizing the development of ethical decision-making skills crucial for professional teaching practices.

Understanding and managing the dual nature of deviance—both negative and positive—fills significant gaps in organisational behaviour research within higher education. Although existing literature has primarily focused on the destructive consequences of deviant workplace behaviour, emerging scholarship is beginning to explore the potential benefits of constructive deviance, which can catalyze innovation, foster creativity, and promote organisational growth. This study contributes to this evolving discourse by examining not only the detrimental effects of deviance but also the opportunities for constructive deviance to instigate positive institutional change.

Through an exploration of department heads' perceptions of lecturer behaviours that deviate from organisational norms, this study identified 65 basic themes categorized into two primary organizing sets:

a) developmental administrative, educational, and ethical behaviours, and b) inhibitive administrative, educational, and ethical behaviours. These themes illuminate the factors influencing such deviant behaviours and offer insights into strategies for enhancing organisational effectiveness.

5.1. Developmental Administrative Themes

One significant finding related to developmental administrative behaviours is the tendency of lecturers to challenge the status quo. Lecturers who question organisational norms do so primarily because they recognize systemic shortcomings and seek to address these issues proactively. Tekman and Kaptangil [40] emphasize that such behaviour reflects a proactive problem-solving approach, with lecturers who exhibit high levels of self-confidence, communication skills, and leadership abilities acting as role models for students and colleagues, fostering a creative and dynamic academic environment. Beyond challenging norms, conscientiousness, responsibility, and strong work ethics emerged as key developmental behaviours. Mehdad and Minaian [22] argue that conscientious individuals, who are structured and reliable, often exceed their assigned duties by demonstrating altruism and civic virtue, both of which contribute to organisational success. Roy et al. [43] further support this by showing that traits such as punctuality and adherence to regulations significantly enhance the overall efficiency and success of the institution. Self-evaluation was another critical behaviour [46], with Chechi, Raji, and Malti [1] affirming that self-assessment improves teaching quality and encourages lifelong learning and self-directed professional growth.

5.2. Inhibitory Administrative Themes

In contrast to behaviours that drive organisational progress, several behaviours inhibit growth and development within educational institutions. Political involvement and the expression of political opinions by faculty emerged as significant inhibitors. Siddique [47] argues that educational institutions, particularly in religious contexts, must align with societal values, and political activities by faculty members often cause misalignment with the institution's core academic mission. Jose and Chully [48] similarly argue that overt political engagement detracts from an institution's focus on education. Additionally, the spread of rumors was identified as a major detractor, with Babai Agbolagh and Satari Ardabili [49] noting that rumors create negative organisational climates, affecting employee attitudes and overall institutional performance. Other inhibitory behaviours include giving false information, undermining colleagues, and absenteeism. These actions erode trust and

disrupt the smooth operation of the institution, while absenteeism diminishes the quality of education, affecting both student learning outcomes and satisfaction.

5.3. Developmental Educational Themes

Creativity in virtual teaching was a central theme in fostering educational development. Instructors who deviate from conventional teaching practices by incorporating innovative and creative methods significantly enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. The OECD [50] highlights the importance of such approaches in promoting interactive, project-based learning environments that empower students and drive deeper engagement. Knowledge-sharing among students was another key developmental behaviour, vital for enhancing intellectual capital and fostering innovation within higher education. The establishment of clear educational objectives, structured lesson planning, and efficient resource budgeting were also essential behaviours supporting institutional development. Structured lesson planning ensures that education is systematic, goal-oriented, and aligned with desired outcomes, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

5.4. Inhibitory Educational Themes

Behaviours such as lack of effort and carelessness in teaching were identified as significant barriers to educational progress. According to Chechi, Raji, and Malti [1], lecturers who feel that their remuneration does not reflect their workload are less motivated to fulfill their responsibilities, which in turn leads to poor performance in teaching and research and weakens student engagement. This lack of effort negatively impacts both individual lecturers' effectiveness and broader institutional objectives. Additionally, a lack of responsibility in research and educational duties was highlighted as a barrier to progress. Professors' negligence in fulfilling their responsibilities stifles student learning and institutional advancement. Rossello and Martinelli [41] argue that research and innovation are key to sustainable development, and any lapse in these areas curtails academic and institutional progress. Furthermore, a reluctance to engage in professional development inhibits teaching effectiveness, as noted by Reyhan, Mumtaz, and Khan [46], who emphasize the critical need for continuous learning.

5.5. Developmental Ethical Behaviours

Developmental ethical behaviours include actions such as providing financial support to students in need, reflecting a strong sense of social responsibility, and a commitment to student success.

This aligns with organisational citizenship behaviour, where individuals exceed their formal roles to benefit the organisation and its members [6]. Participation in spiritual and cultural activities is another significant behaviour, as it reflects lecturers' dedication to values beyond academia, fostering a holistic educational experience and acting as ethical role models for students. Furthermore, lecturers who provide mentorship and guidance beyond their formal duties significantly contribute to student well-being and community cohesion within the department, reinforcing a commitment to student success that transcends conventional teaching responsibilities [51].

5.6. Inhibitive Ethical Behaviours

Inhibitive ethical behaviours, on the other hand, include acts of aggression, intimidation, and verbal abuse, all of which erode trust, create climates of fear, and violate ethical and professional norms [5]. These behaviours align with the broader concept of workplace aggression, which has been shown to cause significant harm to individuals and organisations [13]. Additionally, discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or other protected characteristics undermines principles of equity and inclusion, fostering hostility within academic settings [33], [34]. Such behaviours reflect "organisational injustice," where unfair treatment based on personal characteristics is perceived by those affected [22]. Finally, inappropriate relationships between professors and students lead to conflicts of interest, favoritism, and a breakdown of professional boundaries, highlighting the ethical complexities inherent in power dynamics within educational institutions.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate challenges department heads face in managing lecturer deviance at Teacher Education University, underscoring the duality of constructive and detrimental behaviours. Rather than simply suppressing all non-conforming actions, the findings reveal the need for a nuanced approach that fosters innovation and ethical conduct while mitigating harmful behaviours. To achieve this balance, a culture must be cultivated that prioritizes ethical responsibility, encourages creative problem-solving, and challenges outdated norms. Central to this process is the development of clear and specific ethical guidelines tailored to the unique context of teacher education, ensuring that expectations are well-defined and aligned with the institution's mission. Promoting ethical leadership is equally critical, as leaders must not only model ethical behaviors but also communicate these expectations transparently and hold individuals accountable. A

supportive and collaborative environment, grounded in open communication, mutual respect, and professional development, plays a vital role in reducing the negative impact of deviance while fostering a strong sense of community and shared responsibility. Moreover, the establishment of a transparent system for addressing misconduct, with clear and consistent consequences, is essential for upholding accountability and deterring future unethical actions. By adopting these multifaceted strategies, Teacher Education University can create a more ethically robust and professionally fulfilling environment, enhancing both faculty development and the overall quality of teacher preparation, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and effective education system.

7. References

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